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SWARMING OF THE RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

By J. W. PRESTON

WHEN the endless come and go and care and worry of the city has tired one to the point of distraction, every fiber yearns for a change. How welcome the day when care may be cast aside! Such a time came to me last June. Early, while the mists floated leisurely up from a hill-hemmed lake, and mountain shadows fell heavy and long over the lower forests, and the sun toucht with glory some distant gleaming peaks, I wended my way across the foothills, up onto the shoulders of the mountains, past towering rocks from whose caves and crannies came the flute-sweet notes of the Rock Wren; while distant, circled a screaming hawk, startled from its nest on a dead fir tree. At the crest of a ridge a brood of Nutcrackers croakt their garrulous scoldings.

There, as the cool mountain winds moved among the dwarfed pines, was a clear view of the city and the river winding far into the great dim mountains. Here a trail led to a deep tangle of thicket and steep, rocky hills where the wild deer live during the summer months. How the crisp mountain air buoys you up with unwonted vigor and energy! What a change from the dust and din, way yonder on the paved and noisy streets!

At this elevation the Clarke Nutcracker nests, and here also a company of Western Evening Grosbeaks were nesting. From here I hastened down into the valley of a little brook which hurried along over stones and roots, in and out of mossy nooks, over which grow a dark mass of hemlock, fir and cedar, making a dense, shadowy dell, with pools and cress beds and mossy stones and logs, over which a Varied Thrush hurried to safety. The song of a Vireo lent charm, while wild flowers added their sweetness.

While quietly seated on a rock, enjoying the scene, I was suddenly *attacked* by a female Ruby-crowned Kinglet showing nest-worn conditions of plumage. She flew at my head in a most determined manner uttering an alarm-cry which for the size of the bird was strong. She most thoroly *scolded* me and by her persistent crying called up an interesting and interested company of birds: The Olive-backed Thrush, Louisiana Tanager, several species of Warblers, Western Chickadee, Red-breasted and Pigmy Nuthatches, a Brown Creeper, a pair of Rocky Mountain Jays and several Vireos—what a medley of bird voices! Some were scolding for dear life, some were happily singing their sweetest while others merely craned their necks and peered about to see where the trouble was. But the little Kinglet was the most interested of all. From her perch on a dead twig not ten feet from me she showed all the charms of her graceful birdship. If I moved the least, she was right up and after me.

Soon the male Kinglet came, with a moth in his bill. He seemed to think there was no cause for worry and hopt on up a white fir tree, from branch to branch, until, fifty feet from the ground, he stopt at a mossy ball of a nest suspended from the top of a bough six feet out from the tree. Then he was off again in search of food. By this time the mother Kinglet had subsided and was peering here and there among the bunches of needles and under inviting pieces of bark. Gaining a mouthful of moths and bugs, she too ascended the tree to the nest, and back and forth they went in quick succession, for their brood was numerous and hungry.

For an hour I sat watching the interesting family. It seemed to be swarming time at their house. Some of the little fellows had successfully gotten out and down some distance from the nest, while a busy lot were peering out over the rim and grasping onto the sides, but, fearful, they crawled back to the nest shelter, where from seven to eight were trying their first wings all at once, in fear and trembling; this was a charming little episode of bird life. Then as the mountain shadow came chill, all was quiet as the blue sides of the distant hills.

Spokane, Washington.